



Penn History Review

Volume 24

Issue 2 *Penn History Review*

Article 4

4-5-2019

"An Outstanding and Unusual Contribution": The Emergency Committee in Aid of Displaced Foreign Scholars

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“AN OUTSTANDING AND
UNUSUAL CONTRIBUTION”:
THE EMERGENCY COMMITTEE IN AID OF
DISPLACED FOREIGN SCHOLARS

Sarah Samuels

Generally speaking, I feel the Emergency Committee in Aid of Displaced Foreign Scholars made an outstanding and unusual contribution... We were broken and degraded in spirit, having been chased all over the world. Your efforts helped to restore in us not only self-confidence and self-respect, but what to us seemed to be even more vital, faith in humanity. You gave us a dignified place from which we could start a new life.¹

—Anonymous refugee scholar to the
Emergency Committee

INTRODUCTION

In the 1930s, Germany's Nazi government implemented a series of discriminatory laws to accomplish its twin goals of *Sauberung*, “cleansing,” and *Gleichschaltung*, “coordinating,” the German education system.² On April 7, 1933, the Nazis passed the Law for the Restoration of the Professional Civil Service, which placed restrictions on teachers, forcing them to swear an oath of allegiance to Hitler and teach only lessons in compliance with Nazi ideology.³ Some scholars chose to leave German institutions on principle, refusing to accept the rules of the oppressive regime. Others were not afforded this choice. These laws effectively dismissed any teacher whose beliefs did not “coordinate” with Nazi ideologies.⁴ They extended to political dissenters as well as those classified as non-Aryans, including large numbers

of Jews and other nationalities. Prohibitions against Jews and those of Jewish descent intensified further after the Nazis passed the Nuremberg Laws in September 1935, which placed even greater restrictions on Jews.⁵ Professors and academics, along with many others, found themselves destitute—jobless, homeless, and stateless.

American aid organizations sprung up to meet this new need. The problem they faced was overwhelming in scope, and different aid organizations tackled it through various approaches. Some served as general relief organization for refugees, helping them with everything from the legal aspects of their immigration processes to their personal experiences acclimating to life in America.⁶ Other organizations pursued an explicitly religious mission, aiming to help those who were targeted because of their beliefs or ancestry. Still other agencies focused their efforts on certain professions: there were committees formed exclusively to aid high school teachers, musicians, and physicians.

In 1933, Dr. Alfred E. Cohn, Bernard Flexner, Fred M. Stein, and Stephen Duggan established the Emergency Committee in Aid of Displaced Foreign Scholars to address the growing influx of refugee scholars. They devoted their efforts to finding positions for displaced academics in American colleges and universities, providing their salaries in the form of grants.⁷ In addition, the committee served as an unofficial go-between for universities and refugee scholars. Committee members kept an updated list of displaced European scholars and American university administrators often asked for recommendations from the committee when they had vacancies. Refugee scholars reached out to the committee for help with obtaining positions.⁸

The Emergency Committee faced many difficulties in placing its hundreds of scholars. Americans in the 1930s and 1940s were reluctant to welcome refugee scholars. Reeling from the effects of the Great Depression and World War II, members of the American public were fearful of opening their doors to refugees for both economic and social reasons. Xenophobia

and anti-Semitism were prevalent and adversely affected the reception of refugees. These attitudes, coupled with the cultural displacement many refugees felt after leaving their homelands, strained refugee scholars. The Emergency Committee's public materials downplay these obstacles, presenting the arduous journey of refugee scholars as a smooth transition from European to American universities. Yet analysis of the Emergency Committee's records suggests that, privately, the Emergency Committee members were aware of these challenges. Despite these roadblocks, they continued to match refugee scholars with universities and colleges for thirteen years. Committee members also attempted to help refugee scholars with their acclimation into American life. In the words of the refugee scholar quoted above, Emergency Committee members were “not merely interested in seeing that we had the means of a livelihood; [they] *worked* to see that that livelihood would give us a chance to use our capabilities to our own best interests and that of our adopted country.”⁹

A small executive committee guided the direction of the larger Emergency Committee. Its members shifted somewhat throughout the committee's thirteen-year tenure, but each distinguished participant made important contributions to the Emergency Committee. Notable members included Edward R. Murrow, best known for his career in journalism, and Stephen Duggan, director of the International Institute of Education. Duggan, along with Assistant Secretary Betty Drury, recorded the Emergency Committee's activities in their 1945 book entitled *The Rescue of Science and Learning: The Story of the Emergency Committee in Aid of Displaced Foreign Scholars*. The executive committee worked to obtain aid from and maintain relationships with Jewish foundations, which provided the majority of funding for the Emergency Committee. Its members met once every month and oversaw the operations of the Emergency Committee.

An extended general committee buttressed the work of the executive committee. Felix Warburg and Alan Gregg, two prominent New York City philanthropists, worked as advisors

and connected the committee to wider relief and philanthropy circles. The Emergency Committee also employed staff members to cultivate positive working relationships with universities and other aid organizations. They sent representatives to schools throughout the U.S. to discover any additional needs of the universities “that could be learned only from personal discussion.”¹⁰ While it was still possible, committee members made frequent trips to Germany to meet in person with recently displaced scholars, learn more about them, and extend invitations to them from American universities. Even as it became more difficult to travel to Nazi-controlled Germany, these trips became more important. Details were scarce, as letters from Europe had to be intentionally vague to protect scholars from being detected.¹¹ Personal involvement was crucial in a highly sensitive situation such as the one that the Emergency Committee faced.

The Emergency Committee in Aid of Displaced Foreign Scholars assisted any scholar in need, regardless of creed, race, or religion. Its members approached target universities with a similarly open-minded attitude, placing scholars in varied institutions: small, large, rural, urban, North, South, etc. Though eventually only a small percentage of the total refugee scholars supported by Emergency Committee grants were placed at Historically Black Colleges and Universities, or HBCUs, these appointments, along with the correspondence surrounding them, shed light on a complex relationship between refugee scholars and African Americans in the 1940s. Sometimes, refugee scholars were matched with HBCUs because their field of expertise matched the school’s need. Other times, refugee scholars took the initiative to seek employment at HBCUs because of their interest in studying black communities. Two cases in particular, Professor Julius Lips at Howard University and Professor Frederick Lehner at West Virginia State College, illustrate the tension that was inherent in the relationship between refugee scholars and HBCUs.

In order to succeed, Emergency Committee members

cultivated strong relationships with universities. Committee members reached out to various members of the American intelligentsia and asked them to serve on their advisory subcommittee. Members of the subcommittee met infrequently and mostly communicated through correspondence. The Emergency Committee occasionally solicited their advice on forming policies for refugee scholars.¹² As indicated by internal office correspondence, members of the Emergency Committee considered the subcommittee's primary function to be to strengthen the link between the committee and American universities and rarely consulted its members about its regular activities. Chairman Stephen Duggan penned a note to Secretary Betty Drury, “Think we ought to ask the members of the Advisory Committee to do something + ask advice on some matter so as not to let them feel that they are mere window dressing. Think of something.”¹³ Though the committee did benefit from the advice of its advisors, it was more important to expand and maintain connections with universities and other academic organizations that could help refugee scholars. When one member of the advisory subcommittee retired from his university's governing board, executive committee member Bernard Flexner suggested replacing him because “it is better to keep on our Committee people who are active with the organizations they have represented.” Flexner also recommended removing a different board member who had resigned from his post at the New York Public Library and filling the empty slot on the advisory committee with his successor.¹⁴

Though the Emergency Committee had stronger ties to specific universities and university presidents than others, it made a concerted effort to extend its reach to many different institutions across America.¹⁵ In 1933, the Emergency Committee sent out a letter informing universities of its creation and mission, but the names of the target institutions were not recorded.¹⁶ The Emergency Committee stressed the academic rather than the humanitarian nature of its work. Official statements always mentioned refugee scholars in the context of their scholarship and

the merits that they would bring to their placements, presenting the scholars in a favorable light. Committee members wanted American university administrators to view refugee scholars as assets and consider their placements a way to enrich the cultural and academic landscapes of their schools.

Historically Black Colleges and Universities do not appear to have been included in the initial list of targeted universities in 1933. There is no written record that the Emergency Committee formally decided to reach out to HBCUs, but in September 1941, Laurence H. Seelye, the committee's secretary at that time, sent out a special form letter to a select group of HBCUs.¹⁷ The letter provided background on the Emergency Committee, outlining the reason for its existence. Seelye started the letter by explaining that institutions sometimes contacted the Emergency Committee for refugee scholars if their student enrollment exceeded their expectation. Seelye was deliberate in his wording of the next line: “the candidates we suggest have suffered from Nazi policies, appreciate the relative freedom and democracy of the United States, and have taken out their first papers or are already American citizens.”¹⁸ In this text, Seelye explained why the scholars were in the United States; he later added urgency by citing the dramatic example of a “Nobel Prize winning French scholar [who] may thus be saved from concentration camp.”¹⁹ In other publicity materials, the Emergency Committee touted the freedom of the United States, calling it a safe haven for fleeing refugee scholars. In his letter sent to HBCUs, many of which were located in the Jim Crow South, Seelye modified the committee's stance with the addition of the word “relative.” He portrayed the United States as a place of “relative freedom and democracy” in comparison to the Nazism and Fascism of Europe; yet with this one word, he acknowledged that many parts of America were far from free. Finally, Seelye emphasized the steps refugee scholars had taken in obtaining citizenship. He mentioned that the scholars came from many different countries but stressed that many had already acclimated to America, both

academically and culturally.²⁰ In this letter, Seelye consciously attempted to reassure the HBCUs that they would not have any issues with the refugee scholars, either legally or socially.

A number of the HBCU officials who received Seelye's letter had already been in contact with the Emergency Committee. Some had even employed refugee scholars by this point. Seelye's letter reveals that the Emergency Committee renewed its efforts to establish contact with HBCUs. It also indicates that refugee scholars were actively involved in this process, as Seelye mentioned different refugee scholars who had expressed interest in working at black colleges. He wrote, “besides those competent in the usual disciplines...there are scholars with fields of rarer interests. Two of our candidates are especially interested in colored youth and would like to discover opportunities to teach in colleges or schools with negro clientele.”²¹ Seelye did not specify the precise academic specialties of the scholars mentioned. One university president noted the lack of information provided, bluntly pointing out to Seelye that “[y]ou did not say in your letter what were the special fields of your two candidates with a special interest in colored youth.” The correspondence does not indicate whether the question was ever resolved. Some placements at HBCUs were made according to relevant fields of study. But Seelye's letter indicates that the Emergency Committee took refugee scholars' preferences into account when suggesting candidates to HBCUs.

Refugee scholars' interest in black education often revolved around anthropological and/or sociological methods. Sometimes, this occurred because HBCU vacancies happened to be in those departments, such as at Fisk and Howard University. In other cases, the professors had no formal training in those fields, yet framed their interest in HBCUs in anthropological or sociological terms. This happened often: Professors Anna Stein, Gustav Pollaczek, and Frederick Lehner all mentioned their desire to study race in their correspondence with the Emergency Committee when they inquired about working at HBCUs.

Officials at Fisk University, a historically black university in Nashville, Tennessee, expressed interest in hiring a refugee scholar. In 1934, President Thomas E. Jones of Fisk wrote to the Emergency Committee about an opening in the sociology and anthropology department.²² President Jones considered Friedrich Hertz for the position, but the Emergency Committee rejected him. Franz Boas, renowned anthropologist and frequent correspondent with the Emergency Committee, expressed hesitations regarding Hertz, noting that “Hertz was prejudiced in his slant on anthropological problems on account of his strong Semitic sympathies and that could not recommend him as an impartial scholar.”²³ Boas considered his scholarship flawed. He was not alone in this view—Hertz’s book *Race and Civilization* received criticism at the time.²⁴ One contemporary reviewer shared Boas’s misgivings about Hertz’s impartiality, writing, “as one proceeds one begins to feel that the author has some deep-seated ‘complex’ regarding racial differences.”²⁵

The Emergency Committee suggested Dr. Theodore Danzel as an alternative. In contrast to Hertz, Danzel came highly recommended. Boas wrote that Danzel was “one of the few good German ethnologists,” suggesting that he was an exception in his field.²⁶ The letter of recommendation from Gladys A. Reichard, assistant professor of the anthropology department at Barnard, was more explicit: “Professor Danzel is different from a great many other students, especially the older German students, of Anthropology in that he is interested in man as a human being perhaps more than in the things he does. In other words he likes people, no matter what color they may be.”²⁷ According to Reichard, racial bias among German ethnologists was common.

Danzel expressed his interest in his own words in a letter to President Jones: “Since my youth I made coloured people my particular occupation, either by investigating as an ethnologist the monuments of pre-European time, or more directly by teaching their members some of the knowledge which they

can use in their evolution. So I did teaching in China, so I did investigating among the Indians of Mexico.”²⁸ Though Danzel seemed genuinely interested in the position, historian Gabrielle Simon Edgcomb argues that his logic is reductive in her book *From Swastika to Jim Crow: Refugee Scholars at Black Colleges*. She states that Danzel equated all “other” cultures by suggesting that his background in Mexico and China adequately prepared him to work at a black college. She claims this quote “illustrates how little some of these Europeans knew of the racial situation in the United States and about African Americans at the time.”²⁹ Yet Danzel tried to make the case that he was interested in working with other cultures. The Emergency Committee voted to accept President Davis’s grant application in support of Professor Danzel, but health concerns prevented him from assuming the post.

Perhaps more than any other refugee scholar, Gustav Pollaczek articulated a strong desire to live and work in a black community. Pollaczek, a legal scholar from Austria, specialized in transportation laws.³⁰ Emergency Committee members recommended Pollaczek for vacancies in various fields at numerous HBCUs, including West Virginia State College, Morgan College, Hampton Institute, and Howard University.³¹ Secretary Seelye wrote to President Maclean of Hampton Institute that Pollaczek “was deeply interested in both a personal and a scholarly way in the negro problem. Dr. Pollaczek talked with me later and said he hoped sometime to teach in a negro institution. He is unmarried, said he is interested in his living only and an opportunity to do research in this problem.”³² Pollaczek wanted to work at an HBCU because he saw it as an “opportunity” for further research. Seelye reiterated Pollaczek’s “deep interest in the negro” to President Mordecai Johnson of Howard University, requesting that Johnson keep Pollaczek in mind in case of a future opening at Howard.³³ Yet none of these inquiries concluded in employment for Professor Pollaczek.³⁴

CASE STUDY 1: PROFESSOR JULIUS LIPS

President Johnson did, however, employ another committee-supported refugee scholar at Howard University. In 1938, Johnson and his administration hired Professor Julius Lips, a German anthropologist dismissed from his previous post because of his political views. Perhaps to counteract the common anti-Semitic attitudes of the time, testimonials about Lips’s academic qualifications emphasized his non-Jewish heritage. One representative from a European aid organization wrote,

He is 100% Aryan, but a socialist and has therefore lost everything he had in Germany. The reason why I send you his curriculum is that you once asked for a professor in sociology and also because it seems to me that most of the professors placed by the Emergency Committee are Jews and that it would only be fair to give a man like Mr. Lips a chance.³⁵

Another recommendation, this time from a former employer at the University of Cologne, also stressed Lips’s background. At the end of his letter, the author added in parenthesis, “(He is not of Jewish extraction).”³⁶

After leaving the University of Cologne, Lips worked as a visiting professor at Columbia University, alongside Franz Boas. Boas endorsed his work, stating, “He has conducted in Columbia successfully classes on African Ethnology and particularly an excellent Seminar on Primitive Law...I recommend him to any teaching or museum position.”³⁷ Emergency Committee members, and Edward Murrow in particular, also expressed positive sentiments. Murrow wrote, “I have seen Lips several times and like him immensely.”³⁸ In a more personal letter to Dr. Lips, Murrow sent his “best wishes to both you and Mrs. Lips” and told him that he was “anxious to have an evening with you when

you return to New York.”³⁹

Correspondence between Howard University and the Emergency Committee indicates that members of the university were also pleased with Lips at the beginning of his tenure. After the Emergency Committee’s one-year grant expired, Howard University administrators applied for a grant renewal to cover Lips’s salary for the upcoming 1938–39 school year. The administration also created a new anthropology department with Lips at the helm.⁴⁰

Because of the personal and professional goodwill that Dr. Julius Lips had garnered, the Emergency Committee members were shocked to read an April 1939 headline declaring, “Dr. Julius Lips Quits Howard with Hope of Housecleaning Soon.”⁴¹ The *Washington Daily News* reported that Lips’s resignation was “motivated largely by conditions at the school.” The reporter quoted Lips in the article as saying, “I dislike the ethical and scientific approach of some of the staff members...To keep out of intrigue and factionalism takes all one’s energy and since my job was to do scientific work, my only recourse was to resign.”⁴² Lips also cited an article from the *Journal of Negro Education* that seems to bolster his unflattering picture of life at Howard University: “The Negro college is not serious about the matter of educating the youth entrusted to it...The Negro college has no program, no one central idea. The lack of harmony and cooperation among its teaching staff is tragic. Petty jealousies, eternal conflicts, cheap competition consume the energies of its teaching staff.”⁴³ The author of the *Washington Daily News* article presented Lips as a courageous refugee scholar who voluntarily exiled himself rather than “bow to the dictates of the Nazis.” He accepted Lips’s criticism of Howard University at face value.

Chas H. Thompson, the dean of Howard University, wrote to the *Washington Daily News* to vehemently refute this report. In sharp language, underlined for emphasis, he pointed out that “Dr. Lips did not ‘quit’ the university.”⁴⁴ Rather, the Committee of Instruction and Research of the Board of Trustees

at Howard had decided to fire him. According to Thompson, the university graciously “permitted [Lips] to ‘resign’...instead of [facing] a recommendation for his non-reappointment for a cause.” Thompson outlined Lips’s deficiencies as a member of the Howard faculty, criticizing both his character and professional competence. He wrote that Dr. Lips “possesses an unfortunate temperament and personality,” which hindered collaborative or even “amicable” relationships with his colleagues.⁴⁵ Additionally, Lips had never attracted many students to his classes. Heads of other departments at Howard considered him “unable by his background of experience and perhaps by temperament” to lead the anthropology department.⁴⁶

Dean Thompson also criticized the *Washington Daily News*, attacking its journalistic practices and its representation of Lips’s departure. He noted that the Lips case had no similarities to those of the other former teachers mentioned in the article and that grouping them together was misleading. Additionally, Thompson accused the reporter of quoting the *Journal of Negro Education* out of context, so “as to lead the reader to believe that the article referred to Howard University, when as an actual fact Howard is the last institution to which such a statement could refer.”⁴⁷ Thompson knew definitively from his position as editor of the *Journal of Negro Education* that the journal was misrepresented.⁴⁸ Thompson concluded that the *Washington Daily News* staff was either misinformed or purposefully trying to slander Howard University.

Dean Thompson attempted to convey to all interested parties that Professor Lips had been at fault, that his account of events had no merit, and that Howard University officials had acted appropriately. He insisted that managing editor John T. O’Rourke publish a correction in the *Washington Daily News* with the “same prominence” as the original article. Presumably, he wanted the newspaper’s wider readership, especially those who had read the first account, to be informed of Howard University’s position. Thompson also sent a copy of his letter to the

Emergency Committee in order to provide Howard’s side of the story to the agency responsible for sending Lips to the university. Thompson intended to clear Howard University’s reputation in this scandal, win over public opinion, and maintain the university’s positive relationship with the Emergency Committee.

Thompson did not include anything about the Emergency Committee or Howard University’s association with it within his article. Moreover, he never referred to the fact that Lips was a refugee scholar. This omission suggests that Dean Thompson, and Howard University as an extension, did not blame the Emergency Committee. Nor did Thompson pigeonhole Lips’s behavior as being typical of refugee scholars. Later actions confirm this supposition, as Howard University reached out to the Emergency Committee after the incident, requesting a refugee scholar to fill a new vacancy. The article also did not mention Dr. Lips’s early successes at Howard. This could indicate that Thompson felt Dr. Lips’s behavior was so egregious that it nullified all of the professor’s past contributions. However, it also could have been omitted so that Howard’s previous appreciation of Lips would not detract from its current case against him.

The contentious relationship between Lips and Howard University, which moved to the battleground of the mass media, complicates the idealized relationship between refugee scholars and home institutions presented by Edgcomb’s 1993 book, *From Swastika to Jim Crow*, and the 2000 documentary film of the same name. Both book and film offer an uplifting account of refugee scholars teaching at historically black colleges, portraying refugee scholars and blacks who found mutual understanding in their shared historical experiences of oppression.

The clash between Howard University and Dr. Julius Lips suggests that this relationship was not quite so simple. In the original *Washington Daily News* article, Lips implied that the unfavorable conditions he found at Howard University were related to the fact that it was a black college by selectively quoting from the *Journal of Negro Education* about the shortcomings of

“the Negro college.”⁴⁹ In his response to the inflammatory article, Dean Thompson also touched upon possible racial tensions. He scorned Lips’s use of the quotation from the *Journal of Negro Education*. His mention of Lips’s misuse of the quote in order to disparage all HBCUs, though brief, is enough to hint that racial conflict could have also played a part in this controversy. Even if this case is an anomaly, it demonstrates that tensions did arise between refugee scholars and their new colleagues.

CASE STUDY 2: PROFESSOR FREDERICK LEHNER

The case of Frederick Lehner, a refugee scholar who taught French language as well as German language and literature, presents a stark contrast to that of Julius Lips. Like other refugee scholars placed at HBCUs, Lehner expressed interest in working at a black school. The committee’s Betty Drury described him as “a sophisticated, cultivated European—interested sociologically in the Negro.”⁵⁰ Lehner’s experience at West Virginia State College demonstrates the complexity of refugee scholars’ experience at HBCUs. Edgcomb includes limited elements of Lehner’s story in *From Swastika to Jim Crow*. She presents a simple narrative: President John W. Davis advertised an open post to the Emergency Committee, whose members then sent Frederick Lehner to teach at West Virginia State College. Both college and refugee scholar enjoyed a mutually fulfilling relationship. Lehner and his wife remained there until their deaths, after which the college established a “Doctor Frederick Lehner Loan and Scholarship Fund” in his honor and published a touching tribute in his memory.⁵¹ In Edgcomb’s account, Lehner’s career at West Virginia State College appears as the ideal model of a refugee scholar’s placement at an HBCU.

In her book, Edgcomb includes an early letter from President Davis to the Emergency Committee, in which he outlined the qualifications for the open position in West Virginia’s romance philology department. He then spent the majority of

his letter explaining the racial situation of the school. He cited a recent joint project with the white faculty of Ohio State University and then summarized the situation:

Legally then, our staff is composed of Negroes. Factually and rightly, our staff is composed of Whites and Negroes. In West Virginia we have very little trouble with the so-called race problem. We work here as an accredited college in which the search for truth and cooperative understanding among races and nations forms the dominant tone. The scholars we need would not meet undesirable prejudices here which would offset constructive educational efforts.⁵²

Davis painted an optimistic, almost idyllic picture. His choice of phrasing in describing a campus unaffected by the “so-called race problem” downplayed the situation. This terminology contrasts with the language used by the Emergency Committee and the scholars themselves. Both the committee and the scholars referred to the situation as “the Negro problem”: the Emergency Committee was interested in the repercussions of placing a scholar in the midst of it, and Lehner was interested in studying “the Negro problem.” Davis subtly questioned the legitimacy of this viewpoint, or at least expressed that he viewed the situation through a different lens.

Early correspondence between the Emergency Committee and West Virginia State College adds more details to the story, but reinforces the basic narrative as presented by Edgcomb. President Davis initiated contact with the Emergency Committee, requesting a refugee scholar. As Edgcomb indicates, Davis included information regarding the integration of his college’s faculty. Yet Edgcomb does not note that committee members had made specific inquiries about this point. In an earlier letter to President Davis, Emergency Committee Chairman Stephen

Duggan asked “whether your Staff is made up of a certain number of white teachers; and if so the approximate proportion of Negro and white? I simply wish to present the proposal in as clear a way as possible; I doubt whether I shall come upon any of the undesirable prejudice that exists among certain Americans.”⁵³

President Davis praised the Emergency Committee’s work. He expressed great satisfaction with Lehner and included heartfelt thanks in his letters. When the Emergency Committee decided to give Lehner a grant, he wrote, “Every penny of the grant which you have so wisely made will bring 100% returns in good...I sincerely hope that other colleges in this country have been as successful as this one in the selection of a foreign scholar.”⁵⁴ He reiterated this sentiment in a later letter to Betty Drury, “Please know, Ms. Drury, that the action of your Emergency Committee is in the interest of high educational statesmanship. The grave emergency in which nations now find themselves wrecks the ambitions of many worthwhile individuals. We do well, then, to safeguard even in a limited way the spirit and worth of Dr. Lehner.”⁵⁵ Davis seems to have genuinely believed in these principles. He may also have simply liked Lehner and thought that his presence enhanced his staff. Perhaps he felt that having a distinguished European scholar increased the prestige of his school; here was a statement that West Virginia State College was important enough to employ a refugee scholar.

The publicity materials commissioned by West Virginia State support the notion that officials believed that Professor Lehner’s presence bolstered the reputation of the college. The school created a professional brochure, entitled “Candid Camera Shots of West Virginia State College in Action.” In it, the university stressed its modernity, including impressive pictures of its facilities and clubs.⁵⁶ One photo depicts a scenic “sunset at West Virginia State,” while another portrays the debating society meeting the Oxford-Cambridge debate team. West Virginia State also commissioned its professional photographer to take pictures of Lehner teaching his class, though these pictures were not

“An Outstanding and Unusual Contribution”

included in the final publicity pamphlet. The Emergency Committee had considered including pictures in its annual report, but had to scrap this project because they could only attain “two or three” fitting examples. It is possible that Davis considered using these photos in the brochure and then decided against it, or that he planned on using them for some other purpose. Either way, the existence of these photographs demonstrates that Davis, or other members of the West Virginia State College administration, found Lehner’s presence noteworthy enough to direct the professional photographer to document the refugee scholar teaching in his classroom.⁵⁷

President Davis portrayed Lehner’s placement in the most ideal terms, but the Emergency Committee and Professor Lehner did not view it as optimistically. President Davis perplexed both the committee and Lehner. There were many miscommunications between Davis and the Emergency Committee throughout the refugee scholar placement process. Initially, Davis seemed to misunderstand how the Emergency Committee operated; he attempted to use it as a liaison to communicate with refugee scholars and did not apply for a grant through the correct



“Those terrible foreign sonnets! German conversation”



“Conversational French Phonetics!”

channels. Drury expressed her frustration in a letter to Wilber K. Thomas, secretary of the Oberlaender Trust, who was involved in cosponsoring Professor Lehner at West Virginia State.⁵⁸ She told Thomas that her coworker had tried to explain the situation to Davis multiple times. She had notified him repeatedly that the Emergency Committee did not grant salaries to the scholar directly and that their policy required the university to make a formal application for funding. “Apparently this point is not yet clear to President Davis, however,” and he still had not applied for a grant despite his expressed interest in obtaining a refugee scholar.⁵⁹ Lehner echoed the frustrated tone of Drury’s letter. In the “remarks” section of an Emergency Committee interview memorandum, the interviewer notes that Lehner

[s]ays he will be interested in working with the negroes. Is curious to see how the social relationships are handled. Will unite and tell us. Says President Davis has written him a number of vague and contradictory letters. Is looking

forward to experience and will take it all, good and bad, in good part.⁶⁰

These remarks point to Lehner's concern about the university president, but also express another pressing concern—what would Lehner's experience as a Jewish European be in this mostly black setting? The Emergency Committee expressed this curiosity repeatedly. Lehner was one of the first refugee scholars placed at an HBCU and the Emergency Committee members wanted to learn about every facet of his experience. They remarked on the racial aspects of his placement almost every time they interacted with him.

Many of Professor Lehner's initial reactions to his placement support President Davis's idyllic portrayal and even the idealism of *From Swastika to Jim Crow*. Betty Drury recorded these observations when Lehner came into the Emergency Committee office:

Apparently he is the only white man on the faculty, or in the college community. The president and the staff have been extremely kind to him; no one treats him as an outsider. It distresses him, he says, that negroes cannot go with him to the movies, theater or concert hall. Several of them are driving to the New Orleans MLA convention and invited him to go along; he declined, knowing they could not stop at the same hotel, and so forth...The president wants to make a trip around among the neighboring colleges, showing him off and interesting them in taking other refugees. This, however, depends upon our willingness to make grants afterwards. (An impracticable idea, but an interesting one, and an evidence of the president's approval of our work.)⁶¹

From this account, it seems that Lehner was appreciated and well liked. Many HBCU campuses were self-contained communities. The campuses housed residential and academic buildings, while also hosting recreational activities. Some even had their own movie theaters and held private concerts.⁶² Lehner empathized with his coworkers and was distraught by the segregation of the Jim Crow South. Lehner's appreciation was mutual: President Davis was so impressed with Professor Lehner that he planned a promotional trip around him touting the positive outcomes of the Emergency Committee's activities. Lehner's other correspondence reinforces this picture. The Emergency Committee noted that “the college pleases Dr. Lehner very much. He wrote us once about its atmosphere of ‘scholarly happiness,’ and he enjoys his students greatly. The surrounding country reminds him of the Vienna Woods, and he and his wife go ‘mountain climbing’ on Sundays.”⁶³ Later that year, in a thank you letter to the Emergency Committee, Lehner wrote, “I hope therefore that your and my efforts will soon secure permanent appointment.”⁶⁴ At first glance, this placement seems like an unequivocal success.

Closer analysis, however, suggests a different picture. Lehner revealed to Drury that, contrary to Davis's early assertion, the faculty at West Virginia State was not integrated and he was the only white man in the community. Furthermore, neither Lehner nor the Emergency Committee seemed to share President Davis's enthusiasm about the appointment nor the proposed plan to interest other HBCUs by showcasing his prized refugee scholar to other southern schools. Davis did not specify whether or not the neighboring schools involved in his touring plan were HBCUs, though Drury's commentary seems to suggest that they were. She wrote that the feasibility of Davis's trip was contingent on the Emergency Committee's ability to grant support to scholars at HBCUs afterwards, which did not seem likely based on the current state of the committee's funds. Edgcomb raises the issue of money as a possible explanation for why the Emergency Committee did not expend more energy on trying

to engage HBCUs. Historically Black Colleges and Universities operated on more limited budgets than most other universities, so the Emergency Committee thought that they did not have the money to take on some of the financial burden of the refugee scholars' salaries. However, by this point, the Emergency Committee had placed scholars at many schools that did not have sufficient funds. Drury's comment about the committee's "willingness to make grants afterwards" could have been a reflection on the current financial situation of Emergency Committee. It is possible that the comment also reveals the Emergency Committee's reluctance to prioritize HBCUs.

Further confidential correspondence between Lehner, the Emergency Committee, and other universities demonstrates that the gulf between committee members and Lehner on one side, and President Davis on the other, only widened after Lehner had spent more time at West Virginia State. President Davis continued to be enthusiastic about Lehner's prospects at the school. He praised him effusively and requested and received a grant renewal from the Emergency Committee to employ him for a second academic year in 1940–41.⁶⁵ All of Davis's letters suggest that he was eager to employ Lehner as a full-time faculty member. As an official policy, the Emergency Committee stressed potential permanence as one of its most important criteria. A placement was most desirable to the committee, and therefore more likely to occur, if the university expressed its wish to absorb the refugee scholar into its permanent staff after the expiration of his or her one-year grant.⁶⁶ However, this does not seem to have been the case with Professor Lehner. The Emergency Committee started to look for other employment options for Lehner despite Davis's stated wish to keep him on staff. In one letter to Northwest Missouri State Teachers College, Drury wrote, "We found this place for him, thinking it would be helpful in the process of 'Americanization,' but we naturally do not expect him to continue [at West Virginia State]."⁶⁷ This statement suggests that the Emergency Committee viewed HBCUs as a

stepping stone in the acclimation process—a place to work until a better employment opportunity arose. Drury’s language makes it seem that it was obvious to all involved that Lehner’s employment at West Virginia would be finite.⁶⁸

Lehner soon soured at the thought of staying at West Virginia State College indefinitely. As early as August 1940, he explored the possibility of obtaining Emergency Committee support at a different institution. In a meeting with the Emergency Committee, Lehner assured the committee that he was pleased with the university and the university was pleased with him, but that he wanted to make other connections “if for ‘political reasons’ he should by any chance lose out there.”⁶⁹ Lehner’s definition of “lose out there” is ambiguous. He could have been talking about losing his job for lack of funds or being fired, though the latter seems unlikely based on President Davis’s appreciation of him. It is similarly unclear what Lehner meant by “political reasons.” Lehner’s pleas gradually became more desperate. A four-page, handwritten timeline of Lehner’s situation composed by the committee contained multiple mentions of Lehner’s eagerness to leave. The memo noted that he “is very anxious to get away from W. Va State College now that he is an American citizen. Feels must get experience now in a white institution.”⁷⁰ Once Lehner felt more secure in his status in the United States, he no longer needed the support of West Virginia State, so pretenses were unnecessary. Alternatively, his desire to leave may have stemmed from his academic aspirations. In an interview memo from February 1940, Drury noted his busy schedule:

I really believe he is being exploited for they give him some thirty teaching hours a week, and in addition he has innumerable other duties—German Clubs, French Clubs, lectures, and so forth. It will undoubtedly be a good thing for him

when he can go to another college, on their regular budget. Wanted to know about the possibility of having his grant transferred to another college—white faculty and white students—in the neighborhood, if anything went wrong at W.V.⁷¹

However, if overwork was really the issue, it is unclear how transferring to an all-white institution would have resolved this. Moreover, the explicit desire to teach in a white institution suggests deeper concerns. Whether for social, economic, or intellectual reasons, the committee's records reveal that Lehner remained “anxious to find a college job elsewhere.”⁷²

In the end, Lehner did not get another placement. He stayed at West Virginia State College for the rest of his career. After 1944, the only further correspondence about him is a posthumous tribute published in the 1964 college bulletin. It reads:

From the great centers of learning in Europe—
To the quiet campus of West Virginia State College—Dr. Lehner made the transition readily. For he was a scholar unfettered by the narrow confines of countries, colors or creeds. Thus it was, Frederick Lehner became the first white professor on the staff of this distinguished Negro college. To live in the hearts of men is not to die.⁷³

Despite Lehner's dissatisfaction about working at an HBCU—at least in his early years at West Virginia State College—he clearly excelled there. He had a long and distinguished career and remained a cherished member of the faculty. After he died, the university established a scholarship in his memory.

CONCLUSION

Julius Lips's saga with Howard University ended in a scandal. Frederick Lehner's association with West Virginia State College ended with a lifelong career and a scholarship established in his name. There is no simple way to summarize the relationship between the Emergency Committee and Historically Black Colleges and Universities. However, these case studies provide insight into race relations of the 1940s. They demonstrate that systemic persecutions were drastically different. Refugee scholars came with their own biases and were not automatically sensitive to the new social systems in the Jim Crow South. The unfamiliar environment of HBCUs added an additional challenge to refugee scholars' already difficult acclimation process. Regardless, refugee scholars placed by the Emergency Committee in Aid of Displaced Foreign Scholars left indelible marks on several Historically Black Colleges and Universities.

“An Outstanding and Unusual Contribution”

NOTES

¹ Stephen Duggan and Betty Drury, *The Rescue of Science and Learning: The Story of the Emergency Committee in Aid of Displaced Foreign Scholars* (New York: Macmillan, 1948), 108.

² Arye Carmon, “The Impact of the Nazi Racial Decrees on the University of Heidelberg,” *Yad Vashem Studies* 11 (1976): 131–141, available at http://yad-vashem.org.il/odot_pdf/Microsoft%20Word%20-%203253.pdf.

³ “Education: The Jewish Experience - Key Stage 3 - The Holocaust Explained,” available at <http://www.theholocaustexplained.org/ks3/life-in-nazi-occupied-europe/impact-on-jewish-communities/education-the-jewish-experience/#.WFmaCrYrIXp>.

⁴ The “Law Against the Crowding of German Schools and Institutions of Higher Learning,” passed on April 25, 1933, further restricted “non-Aryans” in the education system. This law limited the number of “non-Aryans” in schools and universities to a prescribed proportion to the “Aryan” student and faculty bodies. “Nazi Anti-Jewish Laws,” available at http://archive.adl.org/children_holocaust/about_nazi_law3.html.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ For example, the National Refugee Service’s records from 1934 to 1952 describe its work as follows: “The NRS program encompassed a migration service that assisted with affidavits, visas and other legal aspects of the immigration process; temporary relief and casework services; job placement, retraining, and small business loans; help in resettling to localities throughout the country; and social and cultural adjustment to American life.”

“Guide to the Records of the National Refugee Service,” National Refugee Service, available at <http://findingaids.cjh.org/?pID=1865416>.

⁷ The name was originally “The Emergency Committee in Aid of Displaced German Scholars.” When the committee members realized that the situation was not contained to Germany, they changed the name to reflect the committee’s broader reach.

⁸ Marjorie Lamberti, “The Reception of Refugee Scholars from Nazi Germany in America: Philanthropy and Social Change in Higher Education,” *Jewish Social Studies* 12, no. 3 (Spring 2006): 157–192.

⁹ Duggan and Drury, *The Rescue of Science and Learning*, 108.

¹⁰ Ibid., 185.

¹¹ Ibid., 184.

¹² Stephen Duggan to Dr. Forest R. Moulton, November 27, 1940, b. 196 f. 4, Emergency Committee for Displaced Foreign Scholars Collection, New York Public Library Archives.

¹³ Stephen Duggan to Betty Drury, January 7, 1942, b. 196 f. 5, Emergency

“An Outstanding and Unusual Contribution”

Committee for Displaced Foreign Scholars Collection, New York Public Library Archives.

¹⁴ Memorandum by Stephen Duggan, December 10, 1941, b. 196 f. 5, Emergency Committee for Displaced Foreign Scholars Collection, New York Public Library Archives.

¹⁵ They also reached out to one university outside of the United States—Hebrew University in Jerusalem.

¹⁶ Duggan and Drury, *The Rescue of Science and Learning*, 175.

¹⁷ This letter was sent out to the following historically black colleges and universities: Atlanta University, Bennett College, Berea College, Bluefield State College (referred to as “Bluefield State Teachers’ College” in the NYPL archives), Dillard University, Hampton Institute, Howard University, Lincoln University, Meharry Medical College, Morehouse College, Morgan State College, Philander Smith College, Shaw University, Spelman College, Talladega College, Tuskegee Institute, and West Virginia State College. I could find no record in the archives revealing why these specific HBCUs were chosen.

“Emergency Committee in Aid of Displaced Foreign Scholars Records,” New York Public Library Archives, available at <http://archives.nypl.org/mss/922#detailed>.

¹⁸ Laurence Seelye to Malcolm S. Maclean, September 23, 1941, b. 141 f. 20, Emergency Committee for Displaced Foreign Scholars Collection, New York Public Library Archives.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Thomas E. Jones to Stephen Duggan, May 16, 1934, b. 140 f. 25, Emergency Committee for Displaced Foreign Scholars Collection, New York Public Library Archives.

²³ Edward R. Murrow, Institute of International Education memorandum, May 16, 1934, b. 140 f. 25, Emergency Committee for Displaced Foreign Scholars Collection, New York Public Library Archives.

²⁴ C. G. Seligman, “RACE AND CIVILIZATION. By Hertz Friedrich, translated by Levetus A. S. and Entz W. . Kegan Paul, Ltd. 1928, xii, 328. 18s.” *Antiquity* 2, no. 8 (December 1928): 510. doi:10.1017/S0003598X00002891. <https://www.cambridge.org/core/article/div-class-title-race-and-civilization-by-hertz-friedrich-translated-by-levetus-a-s-and-entz-w-kegan-paul-ltd-1928-pp-xii-and-328-18s-div/EF5FDDE784E2BC43B9B88704D5088C81>.

²⁵ F. H. Hankins, *Political Science Quarterly* 44, no. 1 (1929): 127–129.

²⁶ Franz Boas to Edward R. Murrow, September 26, 1934, b. 50 f. 47, Emergency Committee for Displaced Foreign Scholars Collection, New York Public Library Archives.

“An Outstanding and Unusual Contribution”

²⁷ Gladys A. Reichard to Edward R. Murrow, September 25, 1934, b. 50 f. 47, Emergency Committee for Displaced Foreign Scholars Collection, New York Public Library Archives.

²⁸ Theodore Danzel to Thomas E. Jones, January 17, 1935, b. 140 f. 25-26, Emergency Committee for Displaced Foreign Scholars Collection, New York Public Library Archives.

²⁹ Gabrielle Simon Edgcomb, *From Swastika to Jim Crow: Refugee Scholars at Black Colleges* (Malabar, FL: Krieger, 1993), 84.

³⁰ Application for Fellowship, April 1944, b.103 f. 5, Emergency Committee for Displaced Foreign Scholars Collection, New York Public Library Archives.

³¹ “Pollaczek, Gustav,” Folder, b.103 f. 5, Emergency Committee for Displaced Foreign Scholars Collection, New York Public Library Archives.

³² Laurence H. Seelye to Malcom S. Maclean, October 13, 1941, b. 141 f. 20, Emergency Committee for Displaced Foreign Scholars Collection, New York Public Library Archives.

³³ Laurence H. Seelye to Mordecai W. Johnson, November 11, 1941, b. 142 f. 22, Emergency Committee for Displaced Foreign Scholars Collection, New York Public Library Archives.

³⁴ Pollaczek’s circumstances are expanded on in the next section.

³⁵ Marie Ginsberg to Mildred Wertheimer, March 22, 1935, b. 21 f. 9, Emergency Committee for Displaced Foreign Scholars Collection, New York Public Library Archives.

³⁶ E. Lederer to Edward Murrow, June 4, 1934, b. 21 f. 9, Emergency Committee for Displaced Foreign Scholars Collection, New York Public Library Archives (emphasis original).

³⁷ Franz Boas to John Whyte, December 3, 1936, b. 21 f. 9, Emergency Committee for Displaced Foreign Scholars Collection, New York Public Library Archives.

³⁸ Edward R. Murrow to L.C. Dunn, January 31, 1935, b. 21 f. 9, Emergency Committee for Displaced Foreign Scholars Collection, New York Public Library Archives.

³⁹ Edward R. Murrow to Julius Lips, September 19, 1937, b. 21 f. 9, Emergency Committee for Displaced Foreign Scholars Collection, New York Public Library Archives.

⁴⁰ Julius Lips to Betty Drury, February 8, 1938, b. 21 f. 9, Emergency Committee for Displaced Foreign Scholars Collection, New York Public Library Archives.

⁴¹ Stanley Baitz, *The Washington Daily News*, “Dr. Julius Lips Quits Howard with Hope of Housecleaning Soon,” June 12, 1938, b. 21 f. 10, Emergency Committee for Displaced Foreign Scholars Collection, New York Public Library Archives.

“An Outstanding and Unusual Contribution”

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Chas H. Thompson to John T. O'Rourke, June 13, 1939, b. 21 f. 9, Emergency Committee for Displaced Foreign Scholars Collection, New York Public Library Archives (emphasis original).

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Baitz, “Dr. Julius Lips Quits Howard with Hope of Housecleaning Soon.”

⁵⁰ Office Memorandum, “Re your trip to the South,” November 29, 1940, b. 20 f. 12, Emergency Committee for Displaced Foreign Scholars Collection, New York Public Library Archives.

⁵¹ Edgcomb, *From Swastika to Jim Crow*, 84–86.

⁵² Ibid., 84–85.

⁵³ Stephen Duggan to John W. Davis, July 6, 1939, b. 157 f. 13, Emergency Committee for Displaced Foreign Scholars Collection, New York Public Library Archives.

⁵⁴ John W. Davis to Stephen Duggan, October 16, 1939, b. 157 f. 13, Emergency Committee for Displaced Foreign Scholars Collection, New York Public Library Archives.

⁵⁵ John W. Davis to Betty Drury, April 15, 1940, b. 157 f. 13, Emergency Committee for Displaced Foreign Scholars Collection, New York Public Library Archives.

⁵⁶ “Candid Camera Shots of West Virginia State College in Action,” August 1938, b. 20 f. 12, Emergency Committee for Displaced Foreign Scholars Collection, New York Public Library Archives.

⁵⁷ Lehner wrote Drury that there were no expenses for the pictures, as the school had paid for them as part of their promotional materials. Frederick Lehner to Betty Drury, March 29, 1940, b. 20 f. 12, Emergency Committee for Displaced Foreign Scholars Collection, New York Public Library Archives.

⁵⁸ The Oberlaender Trust was a different refugee aid organization with which the Emergency Committee dealt extensively.

⁵⁹ Betty Drury to Wilbur K. Thomas, September 8, 1939, b. 157 f. 13, Emergency Committee for Displaced Foreign Scholars Collection, New York Public Library Archives.

⁶⁰ Interview memorandum, September 14, 1939, b. 20 f. 11, Emergency Committee for Displaced Foreign Scholars Collection, New York Public Library Archives.

⁶¹ Memorandum from Betty Drury to Stephen Duggan, December 26, 1939, b. 20 f. 11, Emergency Committee for Displaced Foreign Scholars Collection,

“An Outstanding and Unusual Contribution”

New York Public Library Archives.

⁶² Edgcomb, *From Swastika to Jim Crow*, 84.

⁶³ “Supplement to Agenda,” memorandum, January 16, 1940, b. 20 f. 12, Emergency Committee for Displaced Foreign Scholars Collection, New York Public Library Archives.

⁶⁴ Frederick Lehner to Betty Drury, April 24, 1940, b. 20 f. 12, Emergency Committee for Displaced Foreign Scholars Collection, New York Public Library Archives.

⁶⁵ John W. Davis to Betty Drury, April 15, 1940, b. 157 f. 13, Emergency Committee for Displaced Foreign Scholars Collection, New York Public Library Archives.

⁶⁶ Duggan and Drury, *The Rescue of Science and Learning*, 187.

⁶⁷ Betty Drury to President Uel W. Lamkin, January 1, 1941, b. 20 f. 12, Emergency Committee for Displaced Foreign Scholars Collection, New York Public Library Archives.

⁶⁸ It is interesting that Drury thought this experience would be “helpful in the process of Americanization” since a European scholar at an HBCU was an unusual situation.

⁶⁹ Interview memorandum, August 12, 1940, b. 20 f. 12, Emergency Committee for Displaced Foreign Scholars Collection, New York Public Library Archives (emphasis original).

⁷⁰ Note, “Frederick Lehner,” 1941-1944, b. 20 f. 12, Emergency Committee for Displaced Foreign Scholars Collection, New York Public Library Archives.

⁷¹ Interview memorandum, February 6, 1940, b. 20 f. 12, Emergency Committee for Displaced Foreign Scholars Collection, New York Public Library Archives.

⁷² Note, “Frederick Lehner,” 1941-1944, b. 20 f. 12, Emergency Committee for Displaced Foreign Scholars Collection, New York Public Library Archives.

⁷³ Edgcomb, *From Swastika to Jim Crow*, 86.

Images

Page 87: “Candid Camera Shots of West Virginia State College in Action,” August 1938, b. 20 f. 12, Emergency Committee in Aid of Displaced Foreign Scholars records. Manuscripts and Archives Division. Used with permission of the New York Public Library. Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations.

Page 88: “Candid Camera Shots of West Virginia State College in Action,” August 1938, b. 20 f. 12, Emergency Committee in Aid of Displaced Foreign Scholars records. Manuscripts and Archives Division. Used with permission of the New York Public Library. Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations.